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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NEW DELHI 001445

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SUBJECT: KASHMIRIS SPOIL PM'S DELHI DIALOGUE BUT INDIA  
TAKES THE HIGHER ROAD

REF: A. SECSTATE 29555

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 1269

[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 1175

[1](#)D. 05 NEW DELHI 7877

[1](#)E. 05 NEW DELHI 2884

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Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Prime Minister continues to try to implement his vision of reconciliation in Kashmir, despite much political turbulence there and criticism from the BJP. PM Singh's February 25 roundtable on Kashmir attracted mainstream politicians, academics, and intellectuals, but none of the moderate Kashmiri separatists. The PM's closing remarks included encouraging language promising to review the cases of political detainees in J&K by end-March and convening a second roundtable in Srinagar in late May, which, we hear, may include the separatists; Hurriyat leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq told us he might attend a second roundtable but hoped for a PM-Hurriyat meeting first (to shore up his shaky standing). The positive atmospherics of the PM's roundtable were undercut by the killing of four boys in J&K by Rashtriya Rifles (paramilitary) troops that led to demonstrations and a blockage of local highway. Further feeding the fire in Srinagar was an anti-US/Israel/Denmark protest orchestrated by Shia leaders who condemned the USG for (in their words) having bombed the Golden Mosque in Samara, Iraq (sic). Further complicating matters for the GOI's effort to seek peace in Kashmir, the opposition BJP slammed the PM in Parliament for discussing "self-rule" and "autonomy." The Srinagar protests and the BJP backlash highlight the volatile domestic atmosphere that will attend whatever the President says about Kashmir in India or Pakistan. End Summary.

12. (U) PM Singh on February 25 convened a roundtable originally designed to bring together political leaders, the moderate All Parties Hurriyat Conference separatists, and civil society groups to discuss how the GOI can best address concerns of Kashmiris within the confines of the Indian Constitution (Ref C). The PM was joined by NSA MK Narayanan and GOI Interlocutor on Kashmir NN Vohra; 52 representatives from the mainstream political parties, academia, and interest groups attended, but the Hurriyat leader Mirwaiz Omar Farooq and non-affiliated moderate separatists (i.e. Yasin Malik, Shabir Shah, etc.) boycotted the exercise. The only group attending that advocated territorial change within J&K was the Ladakh Union Territory Front, which seeks to separate Buddhist Ladakh from the rest of J&K and make it a Union Territory within the Indian republic.

13. (U) The PM in his closing remarks called for "an environment where citizens can live without fear and where civil, human, and fundamental rights of individuals are respected and protected." Reiterating that the roundtable was meant to be one step in a longer process, he announced a follow-up session in the second half of May in Srinagar. Building on Army Chief JJ Singh's publicized commitment earlier this month to end custodial killings in J&K (Ref B), the PM added that "every effort will be made that in dealing with terrorism and militancy, no innocent person should suffer" -- a reference clearly necessary in light of the recent Kupwara shooting (see below). Consistent with the PM's policy of seeking middle ground, he noted the "necessity of maintaining the unity of the state" while providing space

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eye to releasing any against whom there are no serious charges. PM Singh also underlined the importance of continuing the peace process with Pakistan

A Mixed Start  
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14. (C) Opinions on the gathering were predictably split. Lok Sabha MP (Ladakh) Thupstan Chhewang hailed the event as a first-ever gathering of the J&K political parties, itself a useful exercise. "Chattan" editor Tahir Mohi-ud-din was more subdued, applauding the statement on reviewing cases but observing that the absence of the Hurriyat kept expectations low; pro-separatist "Daily Excelsior" Srinagar Bureau Chief Ahmad Ali Fayaz suggested that low enthusiasm in the Valley stemmed from "Delhi losing credibility ... the next round in Srinagar my break the ice, if the Hurriyat attends." AFP's Srinagar correspondent Izhar Wani, however, called the roundtable's impact "zero, because the separatists did not participate"; it was "premature," he added.

It's Our Party and We'll Cry If We Want To  
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15. (C) In sharp contrast to his sour and unhelpful public remarks, Hurriyat leader Mirwaiz was privately more upbeat than Wani, agreeing that the roundtable was premature but adding his commitment to dialogue; the Hurriyat may attend the next roundtable, he told us. However, Mirwaiz added that he hoped for a direct interaction with the PM beforehand, presumably to elevate his own stature going into the May roundtable but also as a long delayed follow-up to the October 2005 GOI-Hurriyat meeting. (BIO NOTE: Mirwaiz injured his foot recently and will be essentially immobile until mid-March. End Bio Note.) The Hurriyat leadership would have ended up looking like mere spoilers were it not for an unfortunate incident -- the shooting of four boys by Indian paramilitary troops -- that gave them the political cover they needed to boycott the roundtable.

Tension in the Valley: Protests After Soldiers Kill Boys

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16. (U) In an event that could not have happened at a worse moment for the PM's dialogue effort, tension in the Valley escalated on February 22, when four boys (aged 10-18) were killed in Dudipurain village, Kupwara District; the paramilitary Rashtriya Rifles reported the boys were killed in a cross-fire with terrorists, but locals who claimed to have witnessed the shooting said the soldiers gunned them down deliberately and without provocation while the boys played cricket. Some 2,000-plus irate villagers initially refused to bury the boys until the shooting was investigated, and instead carried the bodies two kilometers to the

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Srinagar-Kupwara Highway where they disrupted traffic. A Valley-wide strike (which one of our contacts said was "total") and demonstrations in Kupwara followed on February 24-25, along with an informal curfew around the area of the shooting, even as the villagers buried the boys on the evening of February 23. Police reportedly had to disperse some protesters in Srinagar city center with tear gas. J&K Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad ordered a magisterial inquiry into the shooting.

#### The Hurriyat Seizes the Advantage

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17. (C) The APHC subsequently sent a letter to UNSG Kofi Anan that claimed the security forces "had been given full authority by the Government of India to act with impunity," a veiled reference to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the J&K Public Safety Act, which shield soldiers and paramilitaries in J&K from criminal sanctions. Attitudes calmed by February 27, after PM Singh and Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi issued public statements on the killings and announced that each family would receive a 300,000 rupee stipend (approximately \$6650) and two members of each of the boys' families would receive government jobs; Mrs. Gandhi expressed "deep anguish" at the deaths. Both Wani and Tahir-ud-din remarked that the killings gave the Hurriyat and other separatists the political cover they needed to absent themselves from the PM's roundtable without appearing unduly churlish.

#### Ansari Coming Out as Anti-US Heavy

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18. (U) Further clouding the PM's dialogue effort as well as the overall Kashmiri mood, Shia Hurriyat leader Maulana Abbas Ansari, head of the Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen on February 26 led a rally of approximately 3,000 people in downtown Srinagar that castigated the USG as responsible for the February 22 bombing by terrorists of the (Shia) al-Askariya mosque in Samarra, Iraq (Ref A). Senior Sunni members of the Hurriyat also addressed the demonstration, which was held in an area of Srinagar known informally as "Khomeini Chowk (circle)"; protesters shouted anti-US, anti-Israel, and anti-Denmark slogans and affirmed their support for Hamas and "Iranian Mujahedin." (NOTE: The support for Tehran among many Kashmiri Shias stems, in part, from their business and institutional connections to Iran, as well as Iran's centrality for the global Shia community, plus the Iranian government's efforts to make inroads in influencing the Shias of Kashmir. End Note.)

19. (U) Speakers at the rally inflamed the crowd by asserting not only that US troops were behind the bombing, but also that claims the attack was executed by Sunni terrorists were meant to exacerbate sectarian tension. Ansari also alleged the GOI in J&K was intentionally targeting civilians (i.e. the Kupwara shooting), and publicly voiced his support for Iran possessing a nuclear arsenal.

#### BJP Attacks PM in Parliament Over J&K Language

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¶10. (C) Reflecting the sensitive domestic politics that surround the Kashmir issue, Parliament erupted on February 27 when BJP members in both Houses attacked the PM for his references to "self-rule" and "autonomy" for J&K during his roundtable talks, saying that the statement coming ahead of

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the President's visit sent a wrong message about India's relationship with Kashmir. BJP agitation in the Lok Sabha forced the lower house to adjourn; BJP senior leader in the Rajya Sabha Murli Manohar Joshi said the PM should have rejected the ideas of self-rule and autonomy, not promoted them.

Comment: Quiet Kudos, and Patience  
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¶11. (C) Despite this spasm of bad news, PM Singh deserves quiet kudos for persevering with his latest initiative to reach out to all J&K constituencies. Kudos for the largely thankless task of trying to nudge the region and its fractured and duplicitous leadership toward peace and stability (with payoffs domestically and regionally further down the line) must be carefully nuanced to damper any perception that the PM is pursuing his agenda purely at the USG's behest. It is too bad the Mirwaiz and his fickle ilk did not abandon their slogans to start a real dialogue. With a date set for the next round of all-J&K talks and a busy season of Indo-Pak exchanges -- including a possible visit by the PM to Pakistan this summer -- a calm hand and a quiet voice are the best recipe for continued progress. End  
Comment.

¶12. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:  
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)  
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